



# ORGANIZING WAS THE HEARTBEAT

THE TEN-YEAR PATH TO PROGRESSIVE  
GOVERNANCE IN MINNESOTA

2024

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# THE BREAKTHROUGH

In 2023, in a little over 100 days, Minnesota's legislature passed a transformative progressive agenda on a scale not seen since national New Deal legislation of the 1930s. Wins included a fundamental restructuring of the state's budget with historic investments in education, childcare, affordable housing, clean energy and transit. The agenda incorporated paid family leave, paid sick time, a new child tax credit, universal school meals, and free public college for families making under \$80,000 per year. It included major support for labor organizing and workers, broad criminal justice reforms, abortion rights, voting rights restoration for 50,000 Minnesotans, driver's licenses for all, marijuana legalization, a transgender refuge law, and three major climate bills. With just a one-vote Democratic majority, Minnesota moved policies that have been bottlenecked in states with Democratic supermajorities for years.

How did this happen? The short answer is: people organized for it. Over a ten-year period leading up to 2023, grassroots organizations allied with labor built enough people power to not just pass a set of policies, but to fundamentally shape and transform the Democratic party in Minnesota. In doing so, they breathed new life into the state's democracy at a time when our national democracy is under threat.

## How did an ecosystem of organized people in Minnesota achieve enough scale, depth, cross-racial solidarity, alignment, maturity, and resilience to break through?

This case study, based on conversations with a dozen Minnesota grassroots leaders, funders, and electeds, attempts to answer that question. Minnesota's breakthrough was built on decades of previous organizing. The current independent power building formations emerged from and sit within a broader movement ecosystem in Minnesota fighting for racial, gender, economic, and climate justice. We do not claim to cover the entire landscape: our focus is on the organizations and people who participated directly in building a state-level governing strategy over the past ten years. *Our conversations revealed eight strategies which accelerated change in Minnesota. We outline each in this document, with insights and lessons for organizers and funders strategizing their own paths to power across the country.*

*Throughout this document, additional information and "deep dives" are linked to provide a fuller sense of the efforts that have been transforming Minnesota over the past decade. Click as you read to learn more about this remarkable work.*



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## STRATEGY ONE:

# ORGANIZE FOR MAJORITARIAN POWER

The cornerstone of the Minnesota breakthrough has been a deep commitment by a key set of organizations to organize regular, working, and poor people of all races into long-term power projects. Rather than fighting for a narrow base of already ideologically-aligned people, they sought new constituencies. By building a majoritarian movement, i.e., a movement led by ordinary people not an ideological vanguard, by offering wide ports of entry rather than narrow ones, and by investing in the leadership and transformation of thousands of Minnesotans, these organizations vastly grew people power. What can we learn from this experience?

## Belonging Comes Before Belief

There are two approaches to base building. We can ask what we are for, and then go out and find the people who agree with us. Or we can begin by asking who we need to organize in order to build enough power to shift everything, and then go where they are: workplaces, churches, mosques, synagogues, schools, and childcare centers. Grassroots organizations that meet people where they are – physically and ideologically – and that create spaces of belonging, learning, and formation rooted in people’s lives and experiences have an unlimited number of people to organize. Most people do not have clearly defined political outlooks, but they can move into public leadership roles. Organizations willing to put their base at the center of their plans can co-create a political agenda that emerges from the lived experience of their bases. As researcher Hahrie Han puts it: build belonging before belief. This is the strategy key organizations in Minnesota pursued.

## There is No Shortcut to Deep, Sustained Organizing

Sometimes it is easier to talk about what organizing is by talking about what it is not: it is not building an email list, texting people, or turning them out to vote. Organizers do all of these things, however: *the core role of an organizer is to recruit and develop ordinary people to become powerful leaders within people powered, member-driven organizations.* Every meeting, action, campaign, and training is the greenhouse for leadership development.



[How are Member Leaders Built?](#)  
[Deep Dive #1](#)

## The Path to Scale is Depth

Organizers understand that the development of member leaders (not staff, though staff matter, too) is the most important metric to track. Those leaders go on to activate their own relational networks. *Activating the relational networks of thousands of organized leaders is the only way to achieve the scale needed to win.* While paid electoral campaigns at scale can help win elections, they do not on their own build lasting power. Organized bases staging “interventions” in electoral work is far more significant. Scale must be rooted in local, human-scaled units where every person experiences a path to agency and community, and sees concrete differences in their immediate community as a result of their organizing.



[What Does Locally Rooted Power Look Like?](#)  
[Deep Dive #2](#)

## Get Real About Power

Electoral and legislative politics forces people and organizations to wrestle with their orientation towards power. Minnesota organizers offer a series of questions for anyone serious about wielding power: Are you contesting to win material changes for actual poor and working class constituencies? Or do you prefer the innocence of powerlessness? Are you willing to be implicated in the exercise of power? Are you contesting for power or for your own purity? What is the role you are choosing to play in the theater of struggle? As one organizer put it: *Do you see yourself outside the governor's house in a rat suit, or at the table inside hashing out an agenda that emerged from your base?* To be clear, strategies and tactics of disruption are necessary to shift structures and patterns of power. But how a movement orchestrates the creation of tension and disruption should be rooted in a strategy to shift power.



[Sometimes, Building a Base can be Disruptive](#)  
[Deep Dive #3](#)

## Expand Your Geography

Before 2016, most Minnesota organizing was concentrated in the Twin Cities. Since then, every single electoral cycle has seen geographic expansion. Today, there is powerful organizing across Twin Cities suburbs, Duluth, in southern Minnesota, Rochester, and along the I-35 corridor where Latino/a immigration is concentrated, as well as central Minnesota around the city of St. Cloud. This expansion follows immigration patterns of East African and Latino/a communities who are powering change in those regions. As this is being written, new organizing is taking root in northern Minnesota.

## STRATEGY TWO:

# BUILD CROSS RACIAL SOLIDARITY AND ALIGNMENTS ROOTED IN SELF-INTEREST

*I grew up in Mexico with an old cautionary tale. When the conquistadors arrived, the Aztecs traded their gold for mirrors. For me this story translates to organizing: the gold is the power of our communities; the mirror is the lure of our own reflections as leaders. In communities of color in particular, when we allow our own reflection to transfix us, we trade away the power of community. We can fall prey to the narcissism of activism when we keep fixing the gaze upon ourselves as spokespersons, and righteous ones, but without the larger community behind us. The political world we are trying to change is happy to turn us into tokens or exceptions. We have to resist this lure, put down the mirror, and hold onto the gold – the power of the community we are organizing, their leadership, their path, their becoming.*

Emilia Gonzáles Avalos, Executive Director, Unidos MN

A movement big enough to shift what is politically possible requires organizing across class, race, geography, and generation; no single organization, alignment, or movement can provide this.. Successful multiracial organizations and alignments built in Minnesota offer some learnings.

### Single Constituencies Can Not Move the Dial

In the past decade, Minnesota saw a blossoming of organizing: Latina/o, Black, East African, Asian American Pacific Islander (primarily Southeast Asian). Yet in a state like Minnesota, which is 80 percent white, it is nearly impossible for constituencies representing six percent or less of the population to move an agenda alone. Many Minnesota organizers point back to Minnesotans for a Fair Economy (MFE) as a foundational experience. MFE, a coalition of seven organizations and unions, operated between 2011-17 and made significant breakthroughs in Minneapolis and St. Paul around minimum wage and paid sick time. As Veronica Mendez, Executive Director of Centro De Trabajadores Unidos En La Lucha (CTUL) describes it, after MFE, CTUL no longer took on fights that they could win alone. *Any fight that they could win alone was too small.*

When communities remain in isolation, unable to grow power, cynicism, burnout, and despair can set in. The relatively small size of communities of color in Minnesota means they had no choice but to align across identities: Diversity within our diversity may actually be a strength. It forced cross-racial alignment. Communities of color, facing endemic differentials in power and resources, had to fight to make sure

their agendas and unique identities were not subsumed within majority white organizations and coalitions. The sweet spot seems to be maintaining autonomy while also building authentic unity and alignment across a larger power bloc.



### [A Powerful Example: Faith In MN Muslim Coalition](#) [Deep Dive #4](#)

#### Anti-Racism is Not Enough

While anti-racism offers a framework for understanding and responding to white supremacy, some hard experience in Minnesota proved it is not a solid framework for building power. “Anti-racism” tends to imagine white people as “helpers” or “allies”. Laura Johnson points back to Sanctuary work that ISAIAH congregations undertook in 2017-18 after Trump’s election as an iteration of ISAIAH’s work that still operated from an “anti-racism” framework. White congregations were offering the physical space of their churches to immigrants facing deportations. Johnson remembers meetings where immigrants shared painful stories. The white people’s role was to listen, empathize and feel bad, but never share their own stories or identify their self-interest. The immigrants involved came to resent and ultimately reject this dynamic. When things became difficult, many white people retreated. Johnson concludes, “White people who do not know why they are there are not safe leaders.”

#### Representation is Not Enough

A framework for racial justice which stops at an individual, representative strategy, is likewise a trap. Emilia Gonzáles Avalos, Executive Director of Unidos MN, a statewide Latino/a organization founded by undocumented youth, remembers attending her first Party caucuses in 2018. She was surprised to learn that people from her own community had been participating for years, yet had failed to build much power. These folks had tokenized roles within the Minnesota DFL, but had not succeeded in moving Drivers Licenses for All – the most important agenda item for Latinos in Minnesota – into the DFL agenda. Thinking back on these experiences and others, Gonzáles Avalos points out, “if you are building your demand around representation, it’s like you are asking for a favor. The response from those in power is almost always pity, or one seat at the table. When your demand is based on the power you have built on the ground – everything changes.”



### [Unidos MN’s Unique Path to Multiracial Organizing](#) [Deep Dive #5](#)

#### Build Alignments Rooted in Self Interest

By contrast, a politics of multiracial solidarity organizes all groups, including white people, around self-interest. Race Class Narrative, which posits that the rich and powerful use racism to protect their interests by dividing us and scapegoating communities of color, is a powerful tool for organizing multiracial solidarity.

*Our community has long faced structural inequality and racism. We had never truly experienced real grassroots organizing and power building. In the past, a few individuals from our community, who had access to power spaces, acted as brokers. They would sometimes secure small concessions but often returned with the message that the system's inherent racism prevented progress.*

*With the founding of the Muslim Coalition, we decided to model something different. We joined forces with a multiracial powerhouse, learning and building power alongside other communities, each clear about their agency and self-interest. Through our multiracial organizing efforts, we have learned how to build and maintain power. Our votes have become the margin of difference in many key districts, and we leverage that. Here in Minnesota, we built real power, experienced its impact, and it delivered tangible results for us.*

Imam Mohamed Omar, founding leader of Faith in MN's Muslim Coalition

### **A Power Compass and Power Vehicles are More Important than Alignment Tables**

Despite its success, MFE did not endure. Over time, some groups lost capacity or saw their bases erode; new groups emerged. Our Minnesota Future, a subsequent alignment centered on a statewide co-governing, came together in 2017. This table did not endure, but the vision for co-governance did.

As Doran Schrantz, former Executive Director of Faith in MN, points out, “forms,” or vehicles of alignment are adaptive and fluid – based on political conditions, resources, leadership, and current needs. Front-facing coalitions change, various “tables” emerge and are dissolved. A table is not necessarily a power vehicle. What we need is sustained power like SEIU, Unidos MN, or ISALAH. Then we arrange and rearrange our power based on our strategy and the north star of our shared agenda.

Formal tables can center time, energy, funding, and attention inward to the table, rather than outward to organizing new bases. Coalitions need to be flexible enough to keep moving and stay together, but allow for autonomy and the independent power of each group. Not every group needs to be or can be in every coalition. This lesson may be particularly important for funders: Idolizing a particular form over a strategy is a huge mistake. Let the field evolve and adapt based on political conditions, leadership, and power. And trust them to do it. Do not prescribe a formula for how power needs to be organized for impact.

### **Building the Ecosystem is as Important as Building your own Institution**

While the tables and forms may shift, relationships of trust between organizational leaders and a shared orientation around power and alignment need to be strong. Several Minnesota leaders described the shift in mindset they had to make towards prioritizing the ecosystem as much as their own organizations. Without this shift, any co-governing project will fail.

## STRATEGY THREE:

# BUILD POWER WITH LABOR

Labor has been foundational to the evolution of Minnesota's power building ecosystem, as a funder, agenda builder, organizer of members, and as coalition partners on every major piece of legislation passed. The labor movement itself is in a moment of recalibration, returning to the organizing roots that built labor's power. Many leaders, particularly in Minnesota, have embraced an expanded vision seeking to raise the ceiling for all workers, rather than narrowly focusing on the needs of members. This has created catalytic opportunities for strategic partnership and a positive organizing feedback loop between labor and grassroots organizations.

### Get Real about How Much Power Labor Already Possesses

In Minnesota, labor unions hold veto power within any Democratic trifecta. The task for organizers was to figure out where their agendas overlapped. Where agendas did not overlap, organizers had to build enough trust and/or leverage with labor to prevent them from blocking. A powerful example of this was the Kids Count on US campaign. In 2023, hundreds of organized childcare centers successfully advocated for a new child care department in Minnesota. Education MN, the largest union in the state, had previously focused on universal pre-K. Over several years of partnership, Kids Count on Us moved Education MN to support the full 0-5 campaign. The end result: \$1 billion in ongoing funding for childcare and \$4 billion new funding for public schools.

To sit at the table with labor, grassroots organizations had to reach sufficient scale, with real mobilizable bases. Worker centers like CTUL bridged space between labor and grassroots organizations, and the movement towards Bargaining for the Common Good unleashed new power. For more information, read [Aligning for Power: A Case Study of Bargaining for the Common Good in Minnesota](#).

### Labor Can Jumpstart Change

SEIU funded MFE from 2011-2017 and seeded a set of grassroots organizations to launch 510(c4) strategies in 2017/18. Together, SEIU, Education MN, Minnesota Association of Professional Employees, Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), and ISALAH funded the original Race Class Narrative work in Minnesota. Labor and grassroots funding partnerships are far more symbiotic than other funding relations. In the case of Race Class Narrative, labor funded the research and then implemented its findings within its own base.

Finally, as we dig into in the governing section below, labor was a lead coalition partner in nearly every major piece of legislation passed in 2023.

## STRATEGY FOUR:

# CONTEST IN EVERY FACET OF DEMOCRACY

From 2014 on, organizers in Minnesota made aggressive use of party caucus systems and primaries to reshape the electoral landscape of the state. They brought thousands of new people into previously calcified insider processes. Electoral organizing, from a national funder perspective, can be narrowly conceived as registering and turning out new and infrequent voters. Organizers in Minnesota excel at both – but co-governing requires asking people to be far more than just voters.

### Flex for Multiracial Power

Minnesota's caucus system provided a ripe organizing opportunity. During the 2018 Governor's primary, grassroots organizations mobilized members to participate in precinct caucuses and win delegate spots to the state party convention. Faith in MN delegates went in committed to a collective agenda. Part of that agenda was to make sure that power was being built and wielded by East African, Latino/a, and Black Minnesotans. White members' self-interest was identified in economic and racial justice. They had an additional strategy to build the political power of undocumented Latino/a immigrants who could neither vote, nor at that time, participate in caucuses.

Faith in MN ended up with 11 percent of the delegates and leveraged their delegate power to move candidates for Governor on immigration. With Unidos MN, they organized a Latino/a convention ahead of the official DFL convention and communicated to the Gubernatorial candidates that Faith in MN delegates would follow the vote of the undocumented members of SEIU, Unidos MN, and ISAIAH at the Latino/a convention. Those votes would hinge on whether candidates supported Driver's Licenses for All, public health care, and protections against Trump deportation policies for undocumented Minnesotans. Two candidates, including the future Governor, participated in the forum and embraced all of these positions.

At the DFL convention a month later, grassroots organizations threw their weight behind Erin Murphy, former president of the Nurses Union. Murphy won the party endorsement, but went on to lose to Tim Walz in the primary. But the power flexed on the convention floor shifted the politics of the state, giving organizers a taste of what was possible. Organizations went on to endorse Walz in the general election, kept relations with the Walz administration open through years of divided government, and in 2023 – on the strength of highly visible grassroots organizing during and after the elections – created the conditions for Governor Walz to govern as a progressive champion.

## Move the Party

In 2020, these same groups again organized hundreds of delegates to the convention, where they won a vote to change the DFL rules to allow undocumented Minnesotas and returning citizens whose voting rights had been taken away to participate in caucuses. This win – the first of its kind in the nation – provided critical proof to undocumented Minnesotas that even while immigration reform is stalled at the national level, they could break through within the party and state.

## Use Every Cycle to Shape the Legislature that will One Day Pass your Agenda

Minnesota organizers used caucuses and primaries to reshape the legislature. A small number of primaries of powerful incumbents had outsized impact. Beyond electing individual progressives, primaries – even when they failed – encouraged incumbents to retire and/or become more responsive. As Democrats lost seats in rural Minnesota, and picked up seats in the demographically changing Twin Cities suburbs, the entire caucus moved to the left. By 2023, the legislature was younger, more progressive, more urban, and vastly more diverse than in 2013.

## Set Your Own Strategy and Find the Resources

Party operatives will always prioritize flipping districts from red to blue. *But primaries are a relatively inexpensive lever for organizers in deep blue areas to make statewide change. Just the threat of primaries drives change.* Labor and larger grassroots organizations are generally wary of damaging their relationships to elite power brokers. *Nimble groups of non-institutional players, operatives, and activists willing to challenge powerful-looking incumbents are critical to primary strategies.*

## Inside/Outside Strategies Require Flexible Alignments

Some actors may push hard against moderate forces, while others maintain open lines of communication and/or alliance with electeds. There needs to be sophistication and a resistance to purity politics in order to understand the roles being played, while moving in tandem towards common goals. Conflicts between these approaches are frequent pain points. But a cadre of sophisticated experienced campaigners in Minnesota are now able to move between grassroots bases and political power brokers.

## Candidate Recruitment, Support, and Training matters

Blueprint Campaigns, founded by current State Senator Lindsey Port, operated from 2018-2022 and played a key role in helping first-time candidates, particularly working class people, build grassroots campaigns that could win in the suburbs. Likewise, Women Winning has been an important funder and supporter of pro-reproductive justice women candidates for office.

## STRATEGY FIVE:

# WIN THE NARRATIVE

It would be hard to overstate the impact of Race Class Narrative in moving Minnesota towards its values. *Race Class Narrative is a progressive but majoritarian public narrative strategy*, explicitly designed to combat and win against white nationalist, authoritarian populism. Appeals to racial fear need to be addressed head on. A core Race Class Narrative points out that rich and powerful people (politicians, corporations) use race and other differences to divide us, so that they can pick our pockets and maintain their wealth and power. Originally researched and created in 2018 in partnership with messaging strategist Anat Shenker Osario via the Greater than Fear Campaign, Race Class Narrative has been deployed across the Minnesota ecosystem with tremendous success over three electoral cycles (2018, 2020, 2022). Race Class Narrative invites the anti-MAGA majority into multiracial class solidarity as a path towards multiracial democracy.

### People Move Messages

While the dominant political approach to messaging operates in a top-down framework, treating people as consumers of messages, the truth – borne out by research – is that good messages are ones that people will repeat: in the grocery line, dropping the kids off at school, at the community meeting, and to friends, family, and neighbors. People are more likely to be persuaded by a trusted messenger rather than an advertisement, politician, or political organization. Digital and paid media is the “surround sound” of a robust organizing strategy.



[Race Class Narrative in St. Cloud](#)  
[Deep Dive #6](#)

### Go on Offense

With a multiracial Race Class Narrative strategy for the state, our side can go on offense. Doran Schrantz, former Executive Director of Faith in MN, reports, “We began to relish the ad hominem, racist attacks from MAGA officials, because we knew how to make it backlash against them.”



[Super Eid and #IAmASuburbanMom Campaigns](#)  
[Deep Dive #7](#)

## Powerful Messaging Can Give Democratic Party Insiders Courage

For Democrats running for office, *Greater than Fear* was more than just a message they needed to repeat. They had to overcome their own fear. Breaking the pattern of reflexively cowering in the face of Republican racists attacks takes courage. It means ignoring consultants and pollsters whose advice amounts to conceding the frame on immigration and race, going Republican-lite, or trying to avoid race altogether. Race Class Narrative compels candidates to address race head on.

In 2018, Tim Walz closed his first campaign for Governor with an ad that told a story of Minnesota as a place that welcomes immigrants, placing historic photos of Scandinavian farmers alongside Mexican farm workers today. This narrative victory did not happen in a vacuum. Walz and other electeds received messaging training from Shenker Osario. And social proof offered by grassroots members built the muscle for courage around race and immigration within the Democratic party itself. Candidates for office are unlikely to embrace Race Class Narrative on their own, but a powerful organizing ecosystem can move them past their own fear.

## STRATEGY SIX:

# LEARN TO GOVERN

### Elect Organizers

While shifting the makeup of the Minnesota legislature was critical to breaking through, even more important was *electing leaders with an organizing orientation*. Many electeds came from organizing. For example, current Senate Majority Leader Erin Murphy is a past-President of the Minnesota Nurses Union, Representative Cedric Frazier was an organizer with the Teachers Union, and Representative Liz Olson was a member leader with TakeAction MN. These organizers and others brought movement tactics, including deep canvassing and expanded field and organizing programs, to their House and Senate caucuses. They made skilled use of Race Class Narrative framing in their campaigns and as legislators. In 2023, they understood the assignment: work in tandem with grassroots groups and labor, and organize their own caucus. They had the skills and experience to do it.

### Create Relational and Alignment Spaces with Electeds

In 2017, Representative Olson co-founded the Minnesota Values Project (MVP) with then-Representative Erin Murphy. MVP, a table which eventually gathered legislators, grassroots organizations, and labor, became the crucial space for co-governing. From 2018-2023, MVP first aligned all parties around a set of core values, such as a belief in government as a positive force in solving problems and prioritizing revenue generation to fund the society we want. Then, over time, they developed a collective policy agenda that everyone at the table could support.

### Do Not Self-Marginalize; Become the Center

Crucially, MVP was not a caucus within the DFL attempting to create a progressive bloc of votes. Rather, it was a space founded by some of the most progressive legislators statewide that became the center of gravity and moved the whole caucus towards them.

### Create Structures to Hold Tension

In [Convergence Magazine's Inside/Outside Power](#), Liz Xiong, Communications Director and Political Coordinator at LIUNA Minnesota, credits MVP as a unique space that allowed bridge building between divided parts of the progressive movement – particularly laborers and environmental organizations. She describes MVP as “not the compass, but the compass maker.” Leaders across the state worked in teams on each major piece of the agenda. In the Minnesota House, where Democrats had majorities in 2018 and 2020, policies were passed multiple times in “practice runs.” By 2023, when the trifecta was finally won, the entire agenda could move quickly. A huge budget surplus in 2023 helped as groups’ priorities were not pitted against each other. As Representative Olson pointed out, “None of this was without tension. The question is how do you build structures that can hold tension?”

## Values First, then Policy

Ashley Fairbanks of the 100% Campaign says, “We could move fast in 2023 because we had already agreed on values via MVP. We did not have to go back and figure out what we believed on every policy.” MVP also fostered urgency, which became the byword in 2023. Legislators and organizers pledged to use power boldly, knowing they might not have it again soon. This took courage among the electeds. As with race-forward messaging, that courage was organized and normalized by and with grassroots and labor power.

## STRATEGY SEVEN:

# LOSE, LEARN, PIVOT

*When we fail at the ballot – as Minneapolis organizers did in 2021, when we asked voters to create a new Department of Public Safety in the wake of the murder of George Floyd – we have a choice. We can blame the voters or we can rethink our strategy, our messaging, and our commitment to organizing new people.*

Doran Schrantz, former Executive Director, Faith in MN

## Ride Movement Moments & Survive Backlash

Without long-term power vehicles for organizing, the backlash to movement moments can leave us in a worse place than where we started. Over the past ten years, social movements have been incredibly successful at targeting and moving public perception around racial, economic, and climate justice; but without a focus on power building and co-governing, we will continue to miss opportunities to deliver change.

The power building containers we build must nourish, empower, and rebuild hope – and be sustainable. Politics, by its nature, is unstable and contradictory, and subject to constant setbacks and powerful backlash. Organizing ecosystems need deep capacity in order to navigate crises, uncertainty, and backlash. What we do when we lose determines our fate. Honesty about our losses is a key capacity we need to expand. When we move out of a “who is to blame” framework and into a curiosity about what happened, learning becomes possible.

## Ecosystem Evolution is Not Failure

Many organizations in Minnesota did not survive the pandemic, the uprising after George Floyd’s murder, and especially the backlash that followed that uprising. Internal organizational turmoil, paired with leadership turnovers in the post-2020 reckoning felled others. A massive influx of funding in 2020 that was not strategically deployed, and also not sustained, created as many problems as it solved.

Organizers and leaders committed to a long-term power building strategy found new homes and brought hard-earned lessons with them. The strongest organizations got stronger. Both funders and organizers need to understand these shifts as a natural process of ecosystem evolution, not failure. We need to take risks on new forms and expect evolution. Funders must keep pace and have access to honest assessments from the ground in order to support the most vibrant formations. Organizers need a flexible mindset about the organizations they steward, the alignments in which they participate, and their own role in the overall ecosystem.

## Pivot after Major Losses

One year after the Yes4MPLS loss, organizers won a critical Hennepin County Attorney race on many of the same public safety issues. This was achieved by integrating lessons, particularly on messaging, that had not worked the year before. In 2023, the same organizers pivoted again to statewide power, where significant criminal justice reform policies were passed with far less attention and heat than in Minneapolis just two years prior. Opportunistic movement between local and state campaigns is another form of resilience.

## STRATEGY EIGHT:

# FUND STRATEGIC FREEDOM

Money and funders also have to be organized. Funders themselves have a leadership bridge to cross: to see themselves as active changemakers in their own relational networks. Their leadership role should be to actively organize resources on behalf of funding partners, and to disrupt traditional philanthropic patterns. Both funders and organizers must work to transform relationships between funders and organizers from organizational leader as supplicant to organizational leader as strategic leader who can broker funding. This shift in orientation is not just the right thing to do: in Minnesota, it powered a strategic breakthrough and unleashed organizing power.

### A Core Group of Funders Accelerated Change

The funding landscape in Minnesota is as complex as the organizing landscape, and many funders and donors contributed to this ten-year power building trajectory. Minnesota has a particularly effective donor table, which has proven skilled at winning elections for Democrats.

However, a set of funders played particularly catalytic roles, with a focus on supporting organizing rather than voter mobilization, and a long-term strategy to build governing power. SEIU and the Movement Voter Project (MVP) provided multi-year 501c4 support. An additional large multi-year 501c3 philanthropic investment supported organizing across the ecosystem. We discussed how crucial SEIU's funding was for MFE and seeding 501c4s. MVP stands out as a funder with a similar orientation. Like SEIU, they directly funded state-based organizations, rather than brokering funding through donor tables or national networks. This allowed grantee partners to implement their own strategic vision, rather than contract out their base and volunteers to carry out strategies drawn up elsewhere. These funders also offered unrestricted general operating funds over multiple years: not tied to short-term policy objectives or voter contact metrics. In essence, these funders said, "your strategy is our strategy: go do it." This is funding strategic freedom.

### They Funded Whole Ecosystems

Each of these funders took an ecosystem approach:

- » Funding larger organizations with adequate resources to grow, expand their bases, and their geographies.
- » Supporting emerging groups that represent unorganized or underorganized constituencies.
- » Supporting the coalitional and alignment spaces between them.
- » Supporting capacity building as determined by organizational leadership.

This ecosystem funding fosters a more vibrant, healthy field; lessens competition between groups and fosters more trust and alliance building; spreads risk, protecting the overall ecosystem when organizations implode; allows funders to shift nimbly to where organizing is strongest, rather than be locked into a downward slide with

one organization. When funders cannot fund whole ecosystems due to resource or capacity limitations, they should align with other funders to collectively fund ecosystems.

### **Investing in Organizing Paid Off**

How large was the investment in power-building? SEIU invested approximately \$21 million into MFE. Of that, roughly \$1.05 million per year went into four power building organizations (2011 through 2017). MVP moved an estimated \$8 million over six years to about 20 groups; of that, roughly \$5 million went to power building organizations (2018-2022). An additional 501c3 philanthropic investment moved \$2.1 million into power building groups per year over five years (2018 through 2022).

*All told, these funders invested in the neighborhood of \$21.8 million in power building organizations over ten years.*

During the 2023 legislative session, progressive organizers helped reshape Minnesota's budget for the long-term, and set priorities for investing a \$19 billion surplus into education, childcare, working families, and climate. That is a massive return on investment.

These funders operated independently. In hindsight, we see similarities in orientation. \$21.8 million over ten years is a significant and sustained investment in organizing in one state, but it is not astronomical, nor is it unrepeatable.

What kind of breakthroughs could be unleashed in other states if funders purposefully aligned to fund strategic freedom?

# CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

Between 2014 and 2023, a set of Minnesota organizations vastly expanded their bases, constituencies, and geographies. They set out to build a majoritarian, multiracial working class movement, not a movement of the already converted. They deepened their commitment to the craft of organizing, training and investing in the leadership of thousands of Minnesotans. They created political homes that fostered a deep sense of belonging. With their expanding bases of childcare workers, suburban moms, black barber shops and congregations, low wage workers, young immigrants voting for the first time, and rural folks, they created a broad agenda for change rooted in shared values.

They aggressively used Minnesota's caucus system and Democratic primaries to reshape the Minnesota legislature, electing a new generation of values-aligned legislators, and breathing new life into democratic processes. They researched, tested, and implemented Race Class Narrative. They skillfully used inside/outside politics, building authentic governing relationships with electeds while holding them accountable to a bold change agenda. They lost as many campaigns as they won, but after each loss they pivoted towards new possibilities. And critically, they organized enough funding to allow themselves the freedom to pursue their own strategies.

Minnesota is not a unicorn. What occurred here can be achieved in states across the Midwest and beyond. Given our gridlocked national politics, states offer the best opportunities for progressive change and our last defense for rights (reproductive, LGBTQ, labor, voting, etc.) under assault by a far-right US Supreme Court. And because of the electoral college, they remain at the epicenter of national electoral outcomes. Moving policy, defending rights, and winning elections all require organized power. Minnesota has shown what is possible when organizers set power as their strategic compass and funders follow their lead.

Across the Midwest, organized independent political power at the state level is possible on a five to ten year timeline. This applies to blue states such as Illinois, as well as states deeply rigged by Republicans such as Ohio and Missouri. Nearly all of the organizing described in this study was led by state and local grassroots organizations. An urgent and sustained focus on and investment in state and local organizing ecosystems is needed to move our country away from its current authoritarian slide. The emergency is upon us. Rather than allowing this emergency to distract or paralyze us – we should follow the lead of Minnesota organizers and use this emergency to recommit to long-term power. *Long-term power building is not a distant or a receding goal: it is now.*



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# BACKGROUND: TRIFECTAS DON'T ALWAYS DELIVER

## Governing Power as North Star

Minnesota is often thought of as a blue state, but its politics over the past 40 years have been volatile, yielding divided government over and over. In 2010, when Tea Party organizing won Republican trifectas in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan, and advanced a conservative structural power agenda, Minnesota only narrowly escaped. Democrat Mark Dayton won the governorship by just 8,000 votes, while both houses of the legislature were overtaken by a Tea Party Republican Majority. Dayton's narrow win, followed by a huge grassroots organizing win against a Voter ID ballot amendment in 2012, prevented much of the rollback of democratic and labor rights that happened in other states.

In 2013, the Democratic party won its first governing trifecta in 30 years. Grassroots organizers, who had helped power that win, hoped Democrats would pass long overdue policies in favor of working families: enacting paid family leave, restoring Driver's Licenses to undocumented Minnesotans, and expanding voting rights for returning citizens. They were told that they would have to wait. Fear of "overreach" was the Democrats' governing principle. Caution did not save them. Republicans won back the Minnesota Senate in 2014; it would be ten years before another trifecta.

By 2013, seven Minnesota grassroots organizations and unions working together via Minnesotans for a Fair Economy had made important breakthroughs on corporate and worker campaigns. The failures of the 2013/14 legislative session provoked a sobering recognition of how little power they had in the legislative or electoral arenas. In 2016, this grew more stark when Donald Trump nearly won Minnesota. These events triggered a major recalibration by a key set of grassroots organizations towards organizing, expanding bases of members in new geographies, and turning their sights on governing power. They defined "governing power" as the ability not just to pass a policy or win a campaign, but to set the agenda for a governing majority. Over the next ten years, governing power became their north star.

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# MINNESOTA TIMELINE

**2011**

Minnesotans for a Fair Economy (MFE) created. Key groups align, break through in both Minneapolis and St. Paul

**2013**

Minnesota's First Democratic Trifecta: two big victories: **Marriage Equality and Statewide Minimum wage**

Otherwise, Democratic leaders move cautiously, worried about overreach; most of the agenda is lost and immigrants are thrown under the bus

Grassroots organizations understand that they do not have enough power to shape the agenda

**2016**

**Bernie Sanders wins the Minnesota Democratic Caucus**, signaling that progressives can contest for power within the DFL

**Donald Trump wins the US Presidency**, narrowly losing Minnesota by 40,000 votes

**2017**

**Mosque Bombing leads to the formation of Muslim Coalition at Faith in MN**, fostering the dramatic growth of Somali and East African political power in Minnesota

**Latino/a groups with mixed status members organize to protect themselves from threatened deportation**, build cross-racial solidarity via sanctuary organizing in mostly white churches

**Unidos MN boycotts the DFL annual fundraising dinner over Driver's Licenses for All**; all three gubernatorial candidates respect the boycott, permanently shifting the power of immigrants in the Democratic party

**2018**

**Minnesota House flips to Democrats (Nov)**; many seats in the suburbs picked up by women, BIPOC, queer, and younger candidates: some coming out of movement organizations

**Blueprint Campaigns founded by current State Senator Lindsey Port creates path for progressive first-time candidates to run grassroots campaigns and win in the suburbs**

**Greater than Fear and Race Class Narrative is researched, tested, and implemented in Minnesota with great success.**

**Tim Walz elected as Governor by 12 percent;**  
**Keith Ellison elected as Attorney General;**  
**Ilhan Omar elected to US Congress**

**2012**

**Voter ID defeated**; entrance of MFE groups into statewide electoral politics

**Marriage Amendment Campaign** to which many Minnesota organizers trace their entrance into politics, blueprint for deep canvass

**2014**

**Ilhan Omar successfully primaries Phyllis Kahn**, a Minnesota legislator with 40 years of experience

This signals that a new generation is arriving, leading to retirements and challenges of insiders across the state, particularly in the Twin Cities

**2017**

**Massive upswing in activism and political engagement**; many new formations; established grassroots organizations see massive growth

Many organizations decide to more forcefully engage in electoral politics, creating 501c4 arms (including ISAAH, Unidos MN, Land Stewardship Project, COPAL MN, MN350) with SEIU's support and funding. Brief flowering of national organizational chapters; OurRevMN, INDIVISIBLE, and Women's March MN emerge, most do not endure

**Neighborhoods Organizing for Change and CTUL lead and win fight for a \$15/hr minimum wage**

**Minneapolis becomes the first city in the Midwestern United States to pass paid sick days**

**Groundbreaking wage-theft legislation gave CTUL access to city resources to enforce the ordinance and to train workers on their rights**

**2018**

**During the primary, grassroots organizations organized members to caucus in blocs – winning 15 percent of delegates and bringing many new faces to the statewide convention**

Their support leads to the nomination of Erin Murphy, former Nurses Union President, for Governor; Murphy loses in the primary to Tim Walz and Peggy Flannagan

But the primary contest represents a new high water mark for statewide progressive politics

### 2018-2020

Expanded base building, geographies and leadership development

Minnesota Values Project formed at State Legislature to convene and align key legislators, base building organizations, and labor around a progressive agenda: lays the groundwork for the 2023 Legislative Session

New formations and coalition spaces created include Tending the Soil, Narrative Justice League, 100% Campaign, and We Make Minnesota

Kids Count on Us begins organizing childcare centers and workers across Minnesota: adding a significant new base to ISAIAH and Faith in MN

### 2021

Post George Floyd backlash hits hard; status quo forces reorganize to reassert power via police funding and fear mongering on crime; National Guard deployed twice in Minneapolis, heightened urban and rural polarization

Many organizations/formations do not survive the turmoil; those that do emerge stronger and with new experiences of both the potential for communal solidarity in the midst of crisis and how that solidarity can be broken, disrupted, inverted

Minnesota sees the limits of protest, when not paired with long-term vision of organizing regular people for power and channeling them into sustainable ongoing fights; deep reflections on the limits of identity politics

### 2020

George Floyd murdered in Minneapolis  
Mass movement moment in Minnesota and across the globe; young multiracial crowds flood the streets of Minneapolis in protest  
Uprising and violent police response radicalizes many, polarizes others, and destabilizes many organizations: some of which do not survive

### 2020

November sees historically high voter turnout in Minnesota: 80 percent of the electorate  
Biden wins by eight percent but MAGA turnout is also very high, proving the enduring attraction of white nationalism in the state  
Muslim and Latino/a voters provide margins of victory in several close legislative races; Democrats do not flip the Minnesota Senate, setting up two more years of divided government  
Another series of primaries and retirements turns seats over to younger more progressive leaders, particularly in the Minnesota House

### 2021-22

Legislative session: DFL-led State House with new leadership passes many progressive bills, practicing for 2023 breakthrough

### 2022

Redistricting opens a pathway, organizers break through; Minnesota finally wins a Trifecta  
Turnout is influenced by Dobbs, but also many years of organizing at scale in critical districts  
Faith in MN forms a PAC: allowing direct coordination with candidates and more muscular and visible presence on the political field, increasing their power in the coming legislative session

### 2023 Breakthrough

Minnesota Legislature passes a massive progressive agenda shaped and driven by a cadre of sophisticated and experienced campaigners able to move between the grassroots base and political power brokers

Organizers work via multiple, flexible coalitions for each piece of the agenda

Multiple years of relationship building with legislators via the Minnesota Values Project and other efforts pay off: thousands of organized Minnesotans, including childcare workers, Uber and Lyft drivers, teachers, janitors, undocumented immigrants, returning citizens, young people, and faith leaders, come to the capital repeatedly over the 100-day session to testify, rally and flex their power

This time, the demands of formerly marginalized people, such as Driver's Licenses for All and Restore the Vote sit at the center of the agenda

# 2023 MINNESOTA LEGISLATIVE WINS

## General Progressive Wins

- » Abortion rights codified into law and restrictions lifted
- » Anti-LGBTQIA+ Conversion Therapy banned
- » Trans Refuge Law protects those who seek gender-affirming care in Minnesota
- » Abortion Refuge Law protects those who seek abortion care in Minnesota
- » Driver's Licenses for All passed, following 20 years of undocumented people risking deportation over at any traffic stop

## Workers, Families, and Economic Justice

- » Paid Family and Medical Leave: up to 20 weeks per year for anyone who has earned at least \$3,500 in the last year for health or family emergencies (this will work like unemployment, with employers and employees paying into a fund)
- » Minnesota Child Tax Credit: replaces the expired federal tax credit, estimated to reduce child poverty by 30 percent; undocumented Minnesotans will be eligible for this tax credit
- » Paid Sick Time: six days per year guaranteed for nearly all workers
- » Tax Rebates benefiting low and middle class individuals, paired with taxes raised on wealthy individuals and corporations
- » First increase in General Assistance since 1986
- » Minnesota Indian Family Preservation Act
- » First ever Tribal Local Aid Funding
- » Capped the APR on payday loans, essentially banning predatory lending

## Education and Childcare

- » Universal free school breakfast and lunch (third state in the nation to enact)
- » \$6 billion over the next four years set aside for public education, a ten percent increase, and the first real increase in 23 years; future increases pegged to inflation
- » Free college tuition at Minnesota public colleges for families making less than \$80,000 per year
- » Creation of a new Department of Children, Youth, and Families
- » \$2 billion investment in childcare and childcare workers
- » Ethnic Studies curriculum added to public schools
- » Doubled funding for English language learners

## Healthcare

- » Public option pathway, i.e., expanded access to affordable healthcare, allowing middle-income Minnesotans struggling to afford high deductible plans on the individual market to buy-in to MinnesotaCare by 2027
- » MinnesotaCare opened to all Minnesotans, regardless of immigration status.
- » Hospital mergers regulated to prevent monopolies and keep rural hospitals open
- » Big investment to rescue nursing homes statewide
- » Caps on co-pays for insulin, asthma inhalers and EpiPens
- » Prescription Drug Board to limit drug costs and prohibition on generic drug price gouging

## Housing

- » \$1 billion investment in affordable housing
- » Expanded tenants rights, eviction protections
- » Expanded Renter's Tax Credit, now open to undocumented Minnesotans
- » Large investments to humanely support unhoused people
- » Rental and down payment assistance
- » \$2 billion Bonding Bill, included many initiatives centered in communities of color with environmental, racial, and economic justice priorities:
  - » \$107 million to rebuild the cultural coordinators in Minneapolis and St. Paul which were damaged during the 2020 uprisings
  - » \$6 million for the 1854 Treaty Authority in Northern Minnesota (Indigenous Sovereignty)
  - » \$6 million to open a path for the [East Phillips Urban Farm initiative](#), blocking the controversial Roof Depot Project; instead will build an Urban Farm, Affordable Housing, and Jobs Center at the heart of the largest urban Indigenous neighborhood in the country
  - » \$1.5 million to build the RISE UP Center: a community-based green jobs training center to mentor immigrant laborers into well-paying green jobs
  - » \$3 million to ACER, which will enable a group of African immigrant women to purchase a strip mall in order to develop a cooperative small business incubator in the heart of Brooklyn Center
  - » 20 percent of agricultural bill dedicated to BIPOC farmers
- » Overall, Minnesota residents and initiatives will see a 40 percent increase in funding next year compared to the past two years

## Climate and Environmental Justice

- » Commitment to 100 percent clean energy by 2040, among the strongest standards for climate justice in the nation
- » New statewide goal to reduce greenhouse gasses by 50 percent by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050, while avoiding adverse impacts on communities already overexposed to pollution
- » Minnesota Department of Transportation must consider impact of greenhouse gasses in all new transportation projects
- » \$3 billion in climate and clean energy investments during 2024-2025, and at least \$1.5 billion by 2027, including:
  - » Creation of a green bank
  - » EV and electric bike rebates
  - » Rebates for heat pumps and electrical upgrades
  - » Home weatherization
  - » Deep investments in clean water and soil, reforestation and local food systems
  - » Electric school buses and rooftop solar on schools
- » Partial ban on PFAS/Forever Chemicals (in the state where 3M created them)
- » \$240 million in funding to replace ALL lead pipes in Minnesota
- » Nation-leading cumulative impact assessment required for projects in communities experiencing multiple environmental impacts; a significant Environmental Justice win more than ten years in the making
- » Intervenor compensation, supporting organizations bringing issues to the Public Utilities Commission (i.e., indigenous communities trying to stop pipelines)
- » [Right to Repair Law](#), which requires manufacturers to make available parts, tools and repair information to consumers and independent repair shops

## Transit

- » Long-term dedicated funding (0.75 percent sales tax in the MSP region, or \$200 million per year) to create fast and frequent metro services, electric buses and more; the culmination of a 30 year fight for dedicated funding
- » Cutting edge projects to curb climate pollution in new transportation and land use
- » Transit ambassadors to create safe, welcoming transit (i.e., a non-police response to public safety on transit)
- » Decriminalized fare enforcement
- » Free fare pilot on two metro area bus lines
- » Significant funding for Northern Lights Express (MSP-Duluth passenger train)
- » Investments in greater Minnesota transit

## Additional Labor Wins


- » Increased protections for workers in nursing homes, Amazon warehouses, meatpacking plants, construction sites, hospitals and public schools – including wage theft protections for undocumented people in the construction industry
- » Ban on Captive Audience meetings, i.e., employer required anti-union meetings
- » Ban on non-compete agreements
- » Expanded funding for workplace safety inspectors
- » Teachers able to negotiate class sizes
- » Guaranteed minimum wage for Uber and Lyft drivers; though the Governor vetoed this bill in 2023, a new version passed in 2024

## Democracy

- » Vote restoration for 55,000 people currently on probation or parole
- » Automatic Voter Registration, pre-registration for 16 and 17 year-old Minnesotans
- » Allows voters to make one request for permanent absentee balloting in all elections
- » Outlaws spreading disinformation about voting

## Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform

- » Gun reform, including universal background checks and red flag law
- » Recreational marijuana legalization, as well as expungements for past possession charges and equity licenses
- » Expanded access to harm reduction services and decriminalization of drug paraphernalia
- » No-knock warrants outlawed
- » Probation limited to five years for most crimes (Minnesota has one of the highest rates of people on probation)
- » Clemency Reform: early prison release with good behavior
- » Funding for reintegration after incarceration
- » Free phone calls for inmates in all state prisons (fourth state in nation to enact)
- » Juvenile life without parole eliminated
- » Felony murder reform
- » 200 new public defenders
- » Banned hate/extremist group membership in law enforcement
- » Created Office of Missing and Murdered Black Women and Girls

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## DEEP DIVE #1:

# HOW ARE MEMBER LEADERS BUILT?

## Weeklong Training


Laura Johnson, Lead Organizer at Faith in MN, says the heart of an organizer’s job is to accompany people to “cross the bridge” from operating as a victim to becoming a public leader. One of the most important places that happens is at Weeklong Training. Each year, ISAIAH and Faith in MN hold an intensive training over the course of a week for approximately 150 emerging leaders within their base – and increasingly from the bases of aligned organizations. In recent years, leaders from Unidos MN, SEIU, Education Minnesota, Inquilinx Unidos (Renters United for Justice), and emerging organized bases such as The Mulda, an Uber/Lyft drivers collective, have participated.

Weeklong Training achieves in one week what it might otherwise take years to develop. The key provocations are: Do you want a public life? Do you want to build power? If you want to build power, what is required of your leadership? Skills training (i.e., how to execute a one-on-one meeting, how to develop a following, and how to cut an issue) is covered, but the hard skills are secondary to the transformation of people’s orientation to their own power and deepening understanding of how power operates.

## Weeks of Action

Led by the CTUL workers center and SEIU Local 26, “Weeks of Action” play a similar member leader development role. These actions bring workers together across multiple labor unions and community organizations. Members learn direct action, power analysis, and critical organizing skills. A People’s School, which is always included in the action, engages worker leaders and members in political education around “co-governing” and provides an introduction to strategy and corporate power.

Critically, at both Weeklong Training and Weeks of Action, member leaders come together across race, class, geography, and organizational affiliation. A culture of multiracial solidarity is imprinted on and held between core leaders in these and other gatherings. Alignment across organizations is fueled by the trust and connections built at these events.

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## DEEP DIVE #2:

# WHAT DOES LOCALLY ROOTED POWER LOOK LIKE?

## Locally-Rooted Electoral Power

Leading up to the 2022 election, Faith in MN picked ten pivotal State Senate districts to organize year-round. They then developed East African, Latino/a, and White working class leaders in each district to build followings and organize relational networks.

These leaders organized through Democratic party precinct caucuses to win endorsements for candidates who supported a bold agenda and committed to work with organized power groups. Faith in MN leaders then accompanied these values-aligned candidates via coordinated PAC work. They hosted “agenda shaping” events with the wider public, such as immigrant-led candidate forums, childcare walk-a-days, and tours of East African apartment buildings led by moms. Action after action built leadership, solidarity and political power organized around community leaders.

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### DEEP DIVE #3:


# SOMETIMES, BUILDING A BASE CAN BE DISRUPTIVE

## Bringing Corporate Power to the Bargaining Table

In 2022, a group of East African Uber and Lyft Drivers, exhausted by the increasing exploitation of monopoly rideshare corporations, began organizing drivers in the Twin Cities (90 percent of whom are East African men).

The drivers created MULDA: Minnesota Uber and Lyft Drivers Association, and organized over 3,000 drivers. The emergence of MULDA – and their ability to mobilize hundreds of previously politically invisible drivers to city hall and the state capital – created immense tension, along with attempts to divide, disrupt, and marginalize this emerging base.

In just two years, MULDA has successfully organized campaigns at the city and state level, leveraged their relationships with elected officials, and ultimately forced the passage of a new statewide minimum wage for drivers as well as other protections: marking the first time in the United States that Uber and Lyft have been truly brought to the bargaining table.

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## DEEP DIVE #4:


# A POWERFUL EXAMPLE: FAITH IN MN MUSLIM COALITION

## A Room in the House

For the founders of the Muslim Coalition at Faith in MN, the watershed event that led them towards multiracial power building was the bombing of the Dar-Al-Farooq Mosque by right wing terrorists in 2017. Until then, many East African and Muslim community leaders believed that keeping their heads down and not attracting attention was the best strategy to keep their communities safe. The bombing upended this thinking.

After conversations amongst Imams and community leaders, a set of mosques made a strategic decision to negotiate a path to join ISAIAH and Faith in MN, at the time a majority white organization, to build a multiracial vehicle for power. That negotiation included a set of demands, including: building their own “room in the house” with a brand and name distinct from ISAIAH; maintaining the integrity of Muslim identity and refusing the notion of “interfaith” which, to them, denoted assimilation; two positions on the ISAIAH Board of Directors; and hiring their own “Lead Organizer” for the Muslim Coalition. All of these conditions were accepted and ISAIAH was reborn. Today, the Muslim Coalition, which includes 46 mosques and 74 childcare centers, operates with some autonomy within Faith in MN.

Lessons learned from this experience shaped the structure of the organization. Additional “rooms in the FIMN house” have been built: the Barbershops and Black Congregation Cooperative, Kids Count on Us, the Young Adult Coalition, and the Rural Organizing Project. All of these bases have access to shared resources (i.e., administration, communications, funding development, and lobbying) and, critically, all share a commitment to a joint agenda, agency-rooted leadership development, and power building strategy.

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## DEEP DIVE #5:

# UNIDOS MN'S UNIQUE PATH TO MULTIRACIAL ORGANIZING

## Sovereignty Leads to Coalition

Over the past seven years, Unidos MN has charted an unusual path, first building a large base of Latino/a individuals across Minnesota, and then expanding to welcome a multiracial base into their organization. One step on this path began in 2018, when Unidos MN joined the 100% Campaign, a multiracial coalition which pushed for and won legislation mandating 100 percent clean energy by 2040. The 100% Campaign brought together organizing groups led by and focused on people of color, like Unidos MN, which had not previously been seen as a part of the “climate movement.” Their participation linked Unidos MN to labor unions and primarily white climate organizations like the Sierra Club and Fresh Energy. By bridging groups who often do not align, and leaning on multi-issue organizing groups like Unidos MN who were skilled at mobilizing everyday Minnesotans into action, the 100% Campaign was able to win the strongest clean energy mandate in the country.

For Unidos MN, in addition to safeguarding a future for the planet, the green transition offers opportunities for their community members – many of whom work in construction – to move into well-paying green jobs. In 2022, Unidos MN co-launched the Minneapolis People’s Climate and Equity Plan alongside MN350, linking their base with a base of primarily white homeowners in Minneapolis. In 2023, due to internal turmoil at MN350, that entire base found a new home within Unidos MN. Today, a historically Latino/a organization with Latina leadership is also the home for a broader multiracial power building base united around climate, worker and immigrant rights, and healthcare justice. Reflecting on this evolution, Unidos MN Executive Director Emilia Gonzalez Avalos notes, “As an organization of undocumented and mixed status families, we needed our own sovereignty first. Only then could we fully join multiracial coalitions. Undocumented people, trans people, Muslim people, groups directly targeted by fascism... need their own leadership, their own funding, their own sovereignty first.”

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## DEEP DIVE #6:


# RACE CLASS NARRATIVE IN ST. CLOUD

## Multi-Dimensional Narrative and Organizing

St. Cloud is a highly contested, regional Minnesota city with significant white supremacist organizing. A historically white, German Catholic region, St. Cloud is now 30 percent people of color and 12 percent immigrant, with a large East African community.

In 2018, the Greater than Fear Campaign trained and deployed over 50 “trusted messengers”: pastors, teachers, and community leaders in St. Cloud to use their own social media accounts to advance evidence-based Race Class Narrative messaging in their own words. These posts got much higher traction than paid ads sponsored by Faith in MN, and much more traction than messages sponsored by the candidates.

This is the kind of multi-dimensional narrative and organizing work that can shift the story in a real place in real time.

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## DEEP DIVE #7:

# SUPER EID AND #IAMASUBURBANMOM CAMPAIGNS

## Messaging Against Stereotypes

In 2018, organizers of the newly created Muslim Coalition at Faith in MN decided to hold a mass community Eid celebration at the US Bank Stadium, the Vikings football stadium in downtown Minneapolis. Not surprisingly, given how MAGA had supercharged Islamophobia, Republicans freaked out. Right-wing outlets and social media reported that Muslims would be sacrificing animals on the 50-yard line. A media frenzy ensued – but when that frenzy encountered images of Muslim families breaking fast, praying together, and playing carnival games with their kids, the narrative shifted to a more complete portrait of Muslim families. Four years later, when Super Eid was organized for a second time, Muslim communities had amassed so much political power that Republican candidates for office attended SuperEid in order to try and woo voters.

Likewise, the #IAmASuburbanMom campaign, which trended in the wake of George Floyd's murder, was potent because it upended stereotypes. After the Republican Minority leader of the Minnesota State Senate demanded that Democratic leaders apologize to “moms out in the suburbs scared to death about what's happening all around them, and seeing the glowing fire in Minneapolis-St. Paul,” ISAI AH leaders across the suburbs of Minneapolis began responding with messages of multiracial solidarity, calling for justice for George Floyd with the hashtag #IAmASuburbanMom. The messaging campaign went viral, extending far beyond Minnesota.

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